

as time passed after the attack leveled out at that number, 300 million, half the population of China.

A voice out of the gloom from somewhere behind me interrupted, saying, “May I ask a question?” General Power turned again in his front-row seat, stared into the darkness and said, “Yeah, what is it?” in a tone not likely to encourage the timid. “What if this isn’t China’s war?” the voice asked. “What if this is just a war with the Soviets? Can you change the plan?”

“Well, yeah,” said General Power resignedly, “we can, but I hope nobody thinks of it, because it would really screw up the plan.”

Rubel comments:

That exchange did it. Already oppressed by the briefings up to that point, I shrank within, horrified. I thought of the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, when an assemblage of German bureaucrats swiftly agreed on a program to exterminate every last Jew they could find anywhere in Europe, using methods of mass extermination more technologically efficient than the vans filled with exhaust gases, the mass shootings, or incineration in barns and synagogues used until then. I felt as if I were witnessing a comparable descent into the deep heart of darkness, a twilight underworld governed by disciplined, meticulous and energetically mindless groupthink aimed at wiping out half the people living on nearly one third of the earth’s surface. Those feelings have not entirely abated, even though more than forty years have passed since that dark moment.

The next morning, as Rubel relates, Secretary of Defense Gates called a meeting “to discuss the proceedings of the previous evening. The Chiefs were there, I was there, and the Secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force joined the group.” Starting with the chairman of the JCS, General